

Office Visit: Current health care legislation more rhetoric and less reform

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Before candidates began campaigning for the 2008 presidential election, health care reform was on the minds of most consumers, politicians and physicians. Dating back to the Clinton administration, Capitol Hill has been looking into how to increase health care access and improve the quality of care Americans receive.

But as our elected officials continue debating this current version of health care reform, they risk preventing the very outcome they hope to achieve. Provisions in current legislation, which has passed the U.S. House of Representatives and is currently under consideration by the U.S. Senate, would halt the development of new physician-owned hospitals and restrict existing physician-owned hospitals from expanding. This would drastically limit consumers' health care options and reduce the ability to seek personalized quality care.

Physician-owned hospitals attract some of the most talented physicians and provide efficiencies and amenities not often found in traditional hospitals. More importantly, physician-owned hospitals enhance competition, ensuring consumers have a choice of where to receive their health care and increasing the quality of care patients receive.

Earlier this year, Consumer Reports released research that showed physician-owned hospitals were some of the best in the country. The independent testing and research organization considered the comments of more than one million patients around the country. Overwhelmingly, Consumer Reports found that patients prefer the quality of care received at physician-owned and operated hospitals.

Locally, eight of Oklahoma's top 10 rated hospitals are physician-owned, including the top-rated hospital in the state. Nationally, physician-owned hospitals rank as the number one hospitals in 19 states. This is particularly remarkable, considering 20 states do not have any physician-owned hospitals in operation. This speaks directly to the quality of care patients receive at physician-owned hospitals.

In addition to freedom of choice and access to quality care, there are serious economic issues to consider. In the state of Oklahoma alone, there are 11 physician-owned hospitals that employ more than 4,100 Oklahomans. Besides the potential for lost jobs, this legislation would risk more than \$415 million that Oklahoma physician-owned hospitals put back into the economy through payroll, vendor payables and taxes.

Nationally, there are 235 hospitals in 35 states that have physician ownership. They employ more than 65,000 people, with a total payroll of more than \$3 billion and generate economic activity exceeding \$3.5 billion. Currently, there are more than 120 projects under development in 22 states. If they are able to open, they will provide an additional 25,000 jobs, which is critical for our economy.

The health care reform legislation promises to guarantee choice of doctor and assure high-quality health care. In all actuality, this legislation will be detrimental, both limiting the quality of health care received and reducing the likelihood of selecting your own physician. Expanding access to health care to all Oklahomans is crucial, but this current legislation sounds more like Washington rhetoric than Main Street reform.

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